



NEURODIVERSITY

# Increasing Engagement With Dramatic Literature Using Neurodivergent Reading Strategies

## Through an Equity-Minded SoTL Lens

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LibriVox Free Public Domain Audio Books

### Background

Why are my student's struggling to read dramatic literature? So often we are faced with students who haven't done the reading and are silent during in-class discussions in our General Education Introduction to Theatre courses. Is it possible that some of my students are struggling to engage with dramatic texts and are lacking the tools and confidence to do so?

Following my own late in life ADHD diagnosis, I became intensely interested in neurodivergence and how to support my students. This study seeks to discover if implementing neurodivergent reading strategies can improve student engagement with dramatic literature and subsequently increase classroom engagement and overall student performance.

Many neurodivergent people fall through the cracks and access to diagnosis is a privilege. The barriers to diagnosis and support include class, age, gender, race, and social stigmatization. Even if students have a diagnosis, they often refrain from requesting accommodations until they're already failing in part due to concerns over stigma and faculty resistance (Roberts, Crittenden, & Crittenden, 2011).

### Interventions

#### "How to Read a Play"

Challenging the assumption that college students know how to read dramatic literature, I designed a short lesson on "How to Read a Play" that included the following strategies, many of which are often recommended for neurodivergent students:

- Minimize outside distractions.
- Read Aloud.
- Read while watching a filmed production (provided)
- Listen to a dramatized audio recording through LibriVox.
- Take movement breaks.
- Chunk the material and reward yourself for small goals.
- Take handwritten notes.

#### Journals

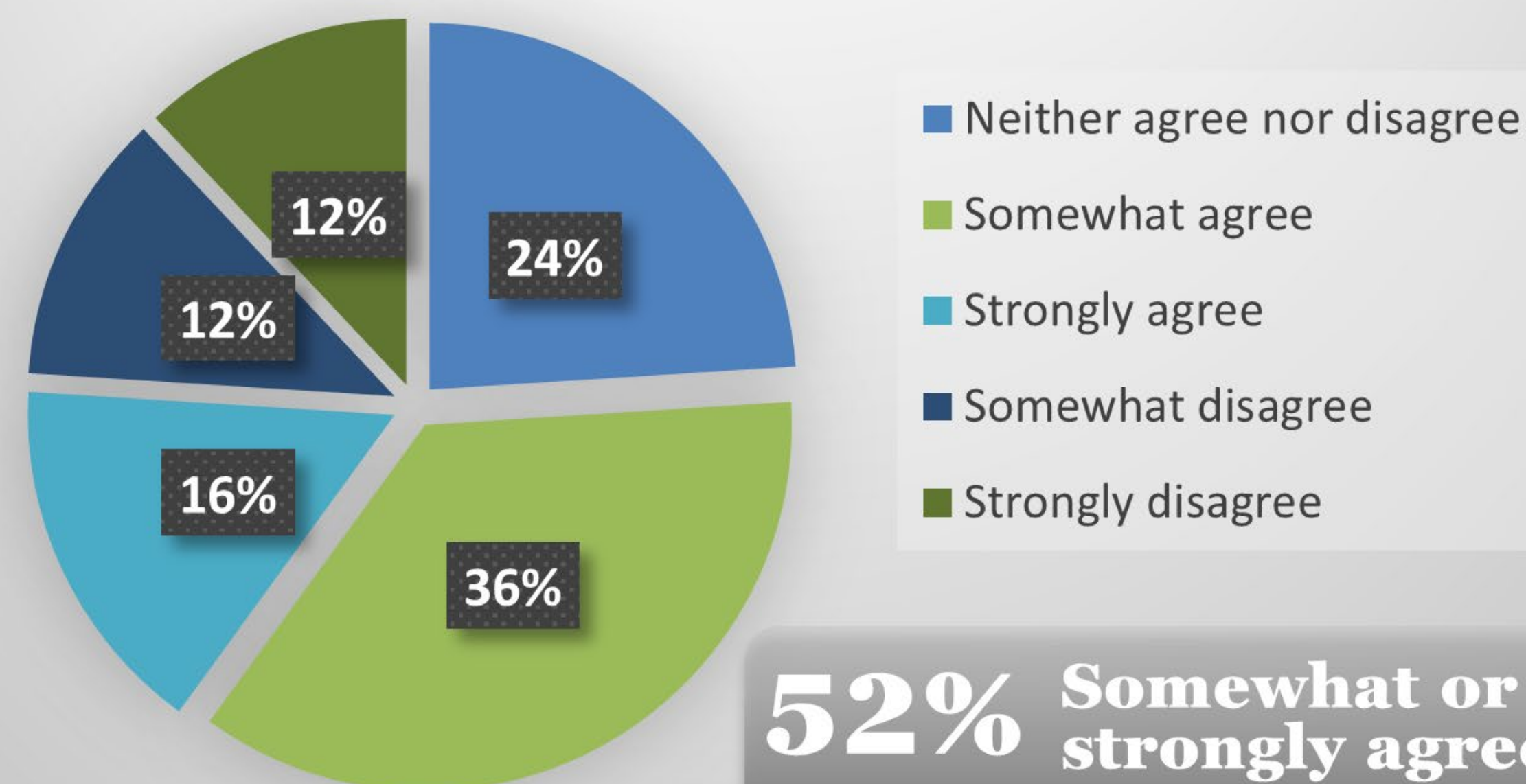
With WTFS funding, I provided each student with a journal for this course. We used the journals for free-writing exercises in class as well as active journaling assignments while reading the assigned plays. Students were asked to respond to 3 prompts in their journals and submit photos of their entries to a discussion board.

### References

Tobin, Thomas J., and Kirsten T. Behling. Reach Everyone, Teach Everyone: Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education. West Virginia University Press, 2018.

Roberts, J.B., Crittenden, L.A. & Crittenden, J.C. (2011). Students with disabilities and online learning: A cross-institutional study of perceived satisfaction with accessibility compliance and services. *Internet and Higher Education*, 14(4), 242-250. Elsevier Ltd. Retrieved April 12, 2024 from <https://www.learnlib.org/p/53723/>.

The reading strategies in class improved my engagement with the dramatic texts.



Which Strategies did you find the most helpful?

"Watching films because I believe I learn well with visuals."

"Reading and watching a film. Helps to keep pace and gives a visual to when you can't picture what is described in the play"

"Read while watching a film version. It's like subtitles."

### Methodology and Results

Students enrolled in Introduction to Theatre 1130 section 4 self-selected to participate in the study. The research design utilized mixed methods of qualitative data (short answer reflection) and quantitative data through anonymous pre- and post-surveys. 32 students responded to the pre-survey and 27 responded to the post survey.

- In the pre-survey students were asked to self-report their neurodivergent status, of which 17 reported a suspected(12) or diagnosed neurodivergent condition(5) for a total of 57% of respondents.
- The post-survey showed significant increases in the use of reading while viewing filmed productions, taking handwritten notes, and movement breaks.
- 52% of students strongly or somewhat agreed that the reading strategies improved their engagement with the dramatic texts.

These findings correspond with an overall sense of increased excitement and more students speaking up during class discussions. Further analysis would be needed to measure this in the future.

### Reflection

Providing accommodations and teaching strategies for neurodiverse students not only improved student engagement with dramatic texts, but also amplified neurodiverse voices in the classroom. The goal of this project was to provide equal access to learning not just for students who have the privilege of diagnosis or have refrained from requesting accommodations (Tobin and Behling, 134). Improving experience and outcomes for neurodiverse students should be a priority in order to create a flourishing educational environment for all learners.

This SoTL project was greatly influenced by the Wisconsin Teaching Fellows and Scholars Program. Using the concepts I learned at the Summer and Winter Institutes, I was able to connect my interest in neurodiversity and my teaching in a way that dramatically improved the experience of my students and myself.

I am sincerely grateful to the WTFS program and the support and encouragement of the community built by Valerie Barske and Heather Pelzel. I would also like to thank my colleague, Tyler Tollefson for his collaboration in developing the surveys and analyzing the data collected.

### Use of Reading Strategies Comparison

Read while watching a film version

52% +16% from pre-survey

Taking handwritten notes

40% +10% from pre-survey

Take movement breaks

52% +9% from pre-survey

Listen to audio book

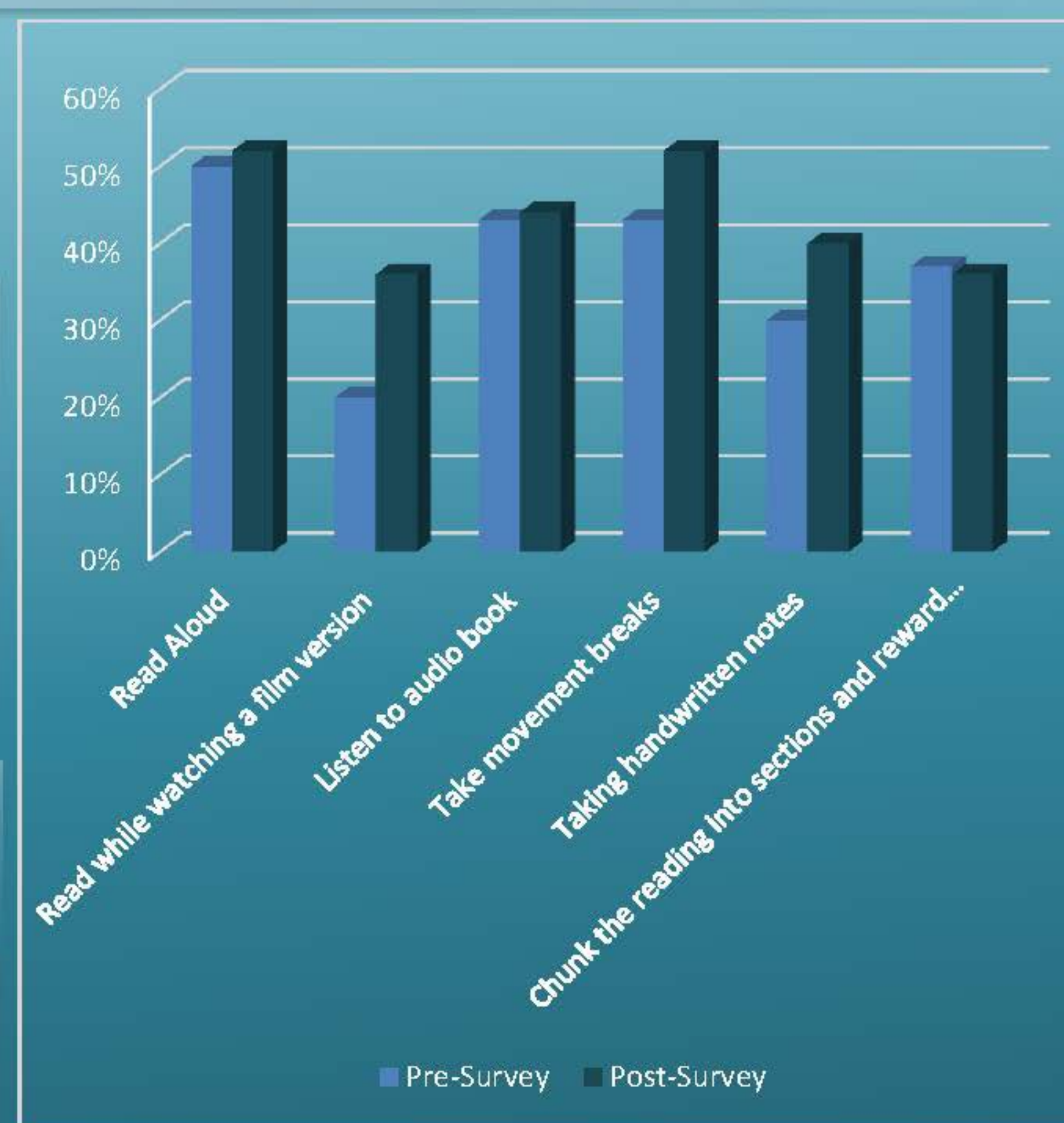
44% +1% from pre-survey

Read Aloud

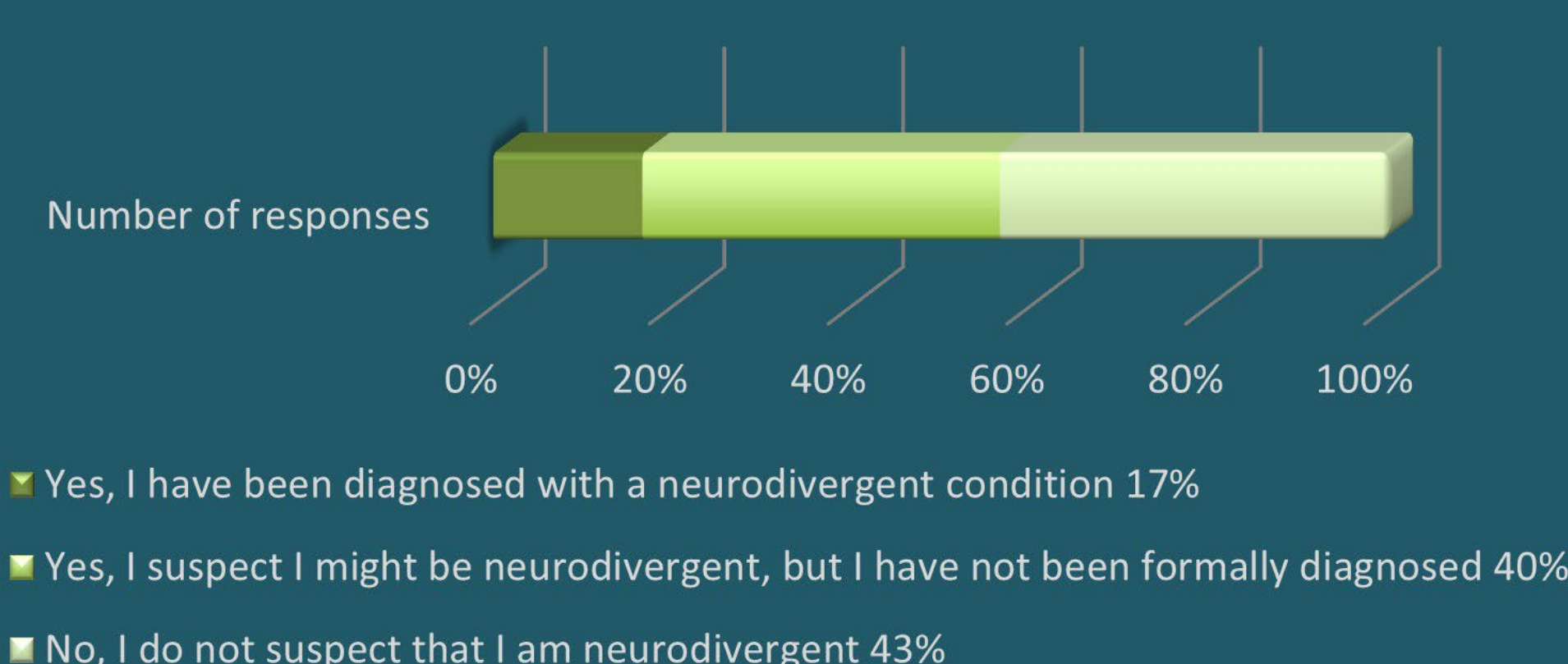
52% +2% from pre-survey

Chunk the reading and reward yourself

36% -1% from pre-survey



### Neurodiversity in my Classroom



57% Diagnosed or suspect neurodivergence